

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SECTIONS 1 AND 2 OF RAISED BILL 6629, AN  
ACT CONCERNING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

March 30, 2011

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy, a private, non-profit legal organization affiliated with the University of Connecticut School of Law. The Center provides holistic legal services for poor children in Connecticut's communities through individual representation and systemic advocacy. The Center also operates a Teen Legal Advocacy Clinic, which provides legal services specifically to teens throughout the state, including an office in Warren Harding High School in Bridgeport, CT. It is because of our advocacy work with victims of teen dating violence at both the individual and systemic levels that **we urge you to support sections 1 and 2 of An Act Concerning Domestic Violence. These provisions will allow greater access to relief from abuse to victims of teen dating violence<sup>1</sup>.**

In 2010, Break the Cycle, a leading, national nonprofit organization addressing teen dating violence, released its annual state by state report card which graded states on how well they protect minors from abusive relationships. *Connecticut received a "C" while all of our neighboring states received a "B" or better.*<sup>2</sup> This is due in part to the lack of specificity in Connecticut laws regarding whether minors can apply to the CT Superior Court for relief from abuse on their own and/or who can file on their behalf.<sup>3</sup> **The amendment in Sec. 2(2) addresses these concerns, in part, by allowing persons in a dating relationship, regardless of the age of such persons, who are victims of abuse to ask the Superior Court for relief from such abuse.** This provision would assist vulnerable teens in getting necessary physical safety from their abusers.<sup>4</sup>



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As you are no doubt aware, as elsewhere, domestic violence in Connecticut is widespread and costly, both to the families that suffer it and to the State. Between October 1, 2003, and September 30, 2005, more than 72 percent of the crime victims served in Connecticut with federal grant funds were domestic violence victims.<sup>5</sup> Research suggests that the violence in these households often has deep roots. Violence in adult relationships may be

<sup>1</sup> Pursuant to Conn. Gen. Stat. § 46b-15(a).

<sup>2</sup> See website of Break the Cycle, <http://www.breakthecycle.org/content/press-release-4610> (last visited 3/30/11).

<sup>3</sup> See 2010 CT Report Card at Break the Cycle, <http://www.breakthecycle.org/system/files/pdf/Teen-Dating-Violence-State-Law-Report-Card-Connecticut-2010.pdf> (last visited 3/30/11).

<sup>4</sup> The Center also supports the expansion of other categories of family or household member to allow teens to get access to relief from abuse in cases where the abuser is their parent, where related by blood or marriage, residing together, and have a child in common. See Conn. Gen. Stat. § 46b-38a(2).

<sup>5</sup> Biennial Activities Report, Oct. 1, 2003 – Sept. 30, 2005, Office of Victim Services, State of Connecticut Judicial Branch.

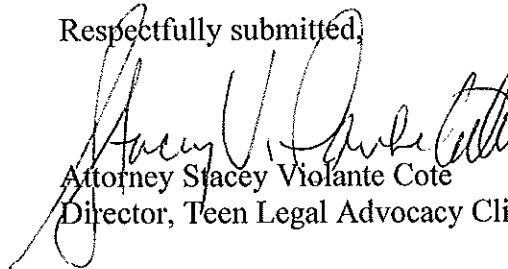
part of a pattern that was established early, and may be more serious if established during adolescence.<sup>6</sup> A study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association concluded that "Violent relationships in adolescence can have serious ramifications for victims: Many will continue to be abused in their adult relationships and are at a higher risk for substance abuse, eating disorders, risky sexual behavior, and suicide."<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately, in these first relationships formed in adolescence, violence is not uncommon. The U.S. Department of Justice has concluded that *females ages 16 to 24 are more vulnerable to intimate partner violence than any other age group – at a rate nearly three times the national average.*<sup>8</sup> The Center for Children's Advocacy's Teen Legal Advocacy Clinic sees this problem among teens with whom we work.


While the problem of teen dating violence is widespread, there's evidence most teens aren't talking to their parents about it. Eighty-one percent of parents surveyed in a 2004 study said either that teen dating violence was not an issue or admitted they didn't know if it was an issue.<sup>9</sup> The bill before you today, then, provides an opportunity to allow teens to directly apply for relief from abuse in dating relationships.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,



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<sup>6</sup> V.A. Forshee et. al., Health Education Research, 11(3) 275-86 (1996); S.L. Feld and M.A. Strauss, Criminology, 27, 141-61 (1989).

<sup>7</sup> Jay G. Silverman et. al., "Dating Violence Against Adolescent Girls and Associated Substance Use, Unhealthy Weight Control, Sexual Risk Behavior, Pregnancy and Suicidality," Journal of the American Medical Association (2001).

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Special Report: Intimate Partner Violence and Age of Victim, 1993-99 (Oct. 2001, rev. 11/28/01).

<sup>9</sup> "Women's Health," June/July 2004, Family Violence Prevention Fund and Advocates for Youth, <http://www.med.umich.edu/whp/newsletters/summer04/p03-dating.html>.